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# Rabbi Leah Sternberg Joins Temple Israel



Rabbi Leah Sternberg

Temple Israel is delighted to share that we are growing our clergy team with the addition of Associate Rabbi Leah Sternberg.

Rabbi Sternberg, her husband, Jordan Vaught, and their three-month-old daughter, Renni, will join us in Memphis this summer from Short Hills, N.J., where Rabbi Sternberg has served URJ Temple B’nai Jeshurun for six years.

Rabbi Sternberg was born and raised in the suburbs of Detroit, where she developed a deep passion for the Jewish community. She received her bachelor’s in History and Jewish Studies from the University of Michigan in 2014 and was ordained at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion’s Los Angeles Campus in May 2019, where she received her master’s in Hebrew Letters

in 2017 along with a certificate in Jewish Nonprofit Management from the Zelikow School at HUC-JIR in 2018.

While at HUC-JIR she had a diversity of experiences: serving congregations as a Rabbinic Intern from Colorado to Santa Barbara, Calif., as a Chaplain Intern at the Los Angeles Jewish Home for the Aging, and as the Rabbinic Intern for the Southern California region of the Reform Movement’s Youth Program (NFTY). During her time in Los Angeles, she worked as the manager of Jewish Engagement and Advocacy for the Jewish Center for Justice. Since ordination, Rabbi Sternberg has served as an Associate Rabbi at Temple B’nai Jeshurun in Short Hills, N.J., with a focus on strategic congregational engagement, deepening social justice and

tikkun olam experiences for the community, as well as ongoing pastoral and pulpit responsibilities.

She is a member of the Core Team of RAC-NJ and a board member of the Jewish Center for Justice. Additionally, she participated in the Israel Policy Forum’s Bronfman Conveners program and Jewish think tank CLAL’s START program in spiritual entrepreneurship. Rabbi Sternberg works each day to help members of the community create authentic connection with one another and with Judaism—from our youngest early childhood learners to the most seasoned of members. She is passionate about advancing Jewish life through innovation and justice, using tradition as a tool to navigate our ever-evolving and ever-challenging modern world. [HW](#)

# Grahamwood Elementary 5th Graders Build Menorahs for Residents of Plough Towers



Grahamwood Elementary students show off their newly made menorahs.

Creativity and passion to give to others was the full energy of 5th grade students at Grahamwood Elementary in Mrs. Sylvia Albert’s STEM Lab.

Mrs. Albert began teaching students the story of Hanukkah and what a menorah is. Most of the students had never seen a Hanukkah menorah or knew about Hanukkah.

Mrs. Albert had her students research what menorahs look like and the art and creativity that each menorah holds.

She also shared a newly published book, “Beam of Light, The Story of the First White House Menorah,” by Elisa Boxer. Mrs. Albert’s students learned about the reclaimed wood salvaged during the Truman-era renovation of the White House. In 2022, the salvaged wood was transformed into a beautiful menorah, the first menorah that was not borrowed.

The first lighting of the menorah was December 2022 by President Joseph



Sylvia Albert delivers the student-made menorahs to Plough Towers.

Biden. This book touched the heart of all her students, and they wanted to build all the menorahs out of wood. Students used their creativity, and their menorahs came out so beautifully.

Following the project, Mrs. Albert reached out to Plough Towers to donate them to the residents to light during Hanukkah.

Director Leigh Hendry and her staff were so excited to receive them.

“The Grahamwood Elementary students did a beautiful mitzvah building all the menorahs,” said Mrs. Albert.

The menorahs have been displayed throughout Plough Towers and have been enjoyed by all the residents and families that visit. [HW](#)

# 2 Israelis Injured in New Orleans Attack with Suspected ISIS Ties that Killed 15



Police cordon off the area around the site of the overnight attack in the French Quarter of New Orleans on Jan. 1, 2025. Credit: Matthew HINTON/AFP

**By Ben Sales**

(JTA) — Two Israelis were among those injured in last Wednesday’s truck ramming attack in New Orleans, which authorities are investigating as the work of a terror cell tied to the Islamic State.

The attack, perpetrated in the first hours of the new year, killed 15 people at a crowded celebration in the city’s French Quarter, and wounded dozens. The attacker, Shamsud-Din Bahar Jabbar, was killed in a firefight with police.

Jabbar, 42, had an ISIS flag in the car with him, and authorities are investigating the possibility that he did not work

alone. Jabbar had reportedly posted videos to social media prior to the attack affiliating himself with the Islamist terror group and may have had explosives in the truck along with firearms that were found there.

Jabbar was a military veteran and had reportedly converted to Islam.

The attack occurred on the same day that a Tesla Cybertruck exploded outside a Trump hotel in Las Vegas, killing the truck’s driver. Law enforcement agencies are looking into whether the two attacks are connected. [HW](#)



My Teen Israel Experience



Adam Epstein during one of many visits to the Western Wall.

Adam Epstein, son of Jonathan and Leslie Epstein, is a senior at Crosstown High School. Memphis Jewish Federation’s Lemsky Endowment Fund provided him with a Teen Israel Experience grant to offset the costs of his Ramah Israel Seminar program. All rising juniors and seniors are eligible for grants of up to \$3,000 to attend a recognized teen program in Israel.

Teen Israel Experience applications for 2025 are open and can be accessed at Lemsky Endowment Fund | Jewish Community Partners (jcpmemphis.org).

By Adam Epstein

Traveling to Israel had a life-changing impact on me, one that’s hard to put into words. It felt surreal when I stepped off the plane, knowing I was finally in a place that had always seemed so far away (especially since my 8th grade Bornblum class trip to Israel was cancelled due to Covid).

I’d read about Israel, heard so many stories, and seen pictures, but nothing prepared me for the feeling of actually being there. Driving from the airport to Jerusalem was like entering another world. The landscape was so different from what I was used to, and seeing Hebrew everywhere was a reminder that I

was somewhere with a deep history and sense of identity.

When we approached Jerusalem, there was so much excitement in our group. My friends from Camp Ramah Darom were there with me. We had already shared so much together and that made the trip even more special. It’s hard to describe the bond I have with them — they’re more like family than friends. We’ve spent summers together, learning about Judaism and creating traditions, but being in Israel took our connection to a whole new level. It felt like we were discovering something important together, something that would stay with us forever.

One of the most powerful parts of the trip was visiting the places I’d only read about in books or heard about from other people. Walking through Jerusalem’s Old City, visiting the Western Wall, and exploring ancient ruins made me feel like I was a part of something big. For the first time, I think I really understood that I’m part of a people with a story that goes back thousands of years. It was incredibly meaningful.

Another impactful part of my trip was seeing some of the aftermath of the October 7th attacks. It was really difficult and sad to see those places. It was hard

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1/9/2025

Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. Jan. 10, 2025 / 10 Tevet, 5785 .....4:48 p.m.  
Havdalah, Sat. Jan. 11, 2025 / 11 Tevet, 5785 ..... 5:48 p.m.  
Weekly Torah Portion: Vayechi

to process so much violence happened in such a beautiful place. It was a reminder that I need to remember these events and understand the challenges facing Israel and the Jewish people. It made me think more seriously about what it means to be Jewish.

During my time in Israel, I also met new friends who I know will be a part of my life for a long time. We were on a bus with a different Camp Ramah and what we all experienced brought us closer together.

Now that I’m back home I feel like a different person. I have a deeper connection to my Judaism, a stronger bond with my friends, and a better understanding of the importance of Israel in my life. This trip helped me discover more about who I am and where I come from. Now, when I hear about Israel, it’s not just a place on a map. It’s a part of me.

Thank you to Memphis Jewish Federation’s Lemsky Endowment Fund for helping to make my Ramah Israel Seminar trip possible. HW



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# The MJCC Larisa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Club Happenings

Lunch is Monday–Friday at 11:30 a.m. All programs start at 12:15 p.m. Monthly Luncheon is at noon.

**Monday, January 13**  
**Ask the Rabbi**  
**Speaker: Rabbi Yosef Braha**  
Rabbi Braha is Rosh Kollel and Director of Operations of the Memphis Kollel. His talks are always one of the highlights for the speaker series. Bring all your Jewish questions and queries that you have been wondering about, but maybe, were afraid to ask. No questions too tough! Rabbi Braha always has a nice, and many times humorous answer. Have a nice lunch and an informative afternoon.

**Wednesday, January 15**  
**Topic: Avoiding Winter Health Risks**  
**Speaker: Tim Flesner**  
Tim has talked to the group many times and usually leaves them with many great ideas to think about. Hand-outs are usually left so no one needs to take notes. Come learn some things you can find useful.

**Monday, January 20**  
**Topic: Hope and Faith**  
**Speaker: Kevin Payne, local Humana Representative**  
Kevin usually brings a nice program where everyone enjoys and learns something. Come have a nice lunch and enjoy the company. Hope to see you there.

**Wednesday, January 22**  
**Big Senior Monthly Luncheon with Entertainment**  
January’s luncheon features The Double D Band, one of our best and most-requested performers. The Double D Band plays a wide range of songs and genres, but especially music from the 50s. Playing guitars and mandolins, they’ve appeared on MTV, BBC, and have been a part of the music scene in London, England, and New York City, having lived and performed in both. The crowd is usually clapping and singing along to these two terrific performers. Come have a really nice time and enjoy the company of friends – old and new. The cost as always is only \$5 for the lunch and the entertainment. The MJCC also has transportation available for only \$2 for those that live around 15 minutes from the Center. Call Steve Kaplan at 901-259-9220 for more information.

Please join us Monday through Friday for a delicious kosher lunch from the kitchens at Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab. The cost is only \$2 for seniors. Reservations are required the day before by 1 p.m. by contacting Steve Kaplan, Adult Services Coordinator, at 901-259-9220 or [stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org](mailto:stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org) or by calling the front desk at 901-761-0810. Steve works Monday thru Thursday 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. **HW**



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12:00 PM

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## Tehranto Resume Nuclear Talks with UK, France, Germany

(JNS) – Tehran will participate in another round of talks on its nuclear program with Britain, France and Germany on Jan. 13 in Geneva, Iran’s semi-official ISNA news agency reported last

Wednesday.  
The last meeting with the three European nations took place in November.  
London, Paris and Berlin last month called on Tehran to “reverse its nuclear escalation,” saying that there is no “credible civilian justification” for the amount of highly enriched uranium it is stockpiling.

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran has become the only non-nuclear state to have uranium enriched to 60%, a short technical step from the military-grade level.  
Tehran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi told reporters in Beijing last Saturday that “2025 will be an important year regarding Iran’s nuclear issue.”  
In comments broadcast on Iranian state television, Araqchi said he had discussed the matter with his Chinese counterpart. The statements may have been an acknowledgment of U.S. President-elect Donald Trump’s vow to apply “maximum pressure” on the Islamic Republic; however, the foreign minister neither mentioned Trump nor elaborated on why 2025 might be pivotal.

Earlier this month, “The Wall Street Journal” reported that Trump’s transition team is weighing two main options to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, including airstrikes.  
In 2018, the U.S. under Trump withdrew from the 2015 nuclear agreement brokered by his predecessor, Barack Obama. According to that deal, Iran committed to scale back uranium enrichment—an activity that can produce materials for nuclear weapons—in exchange for relief from U.S. and U.N. economic sanctions.

Trump snapped the sanctions back, in an effort to persuade Tehran to drop its nuclear program and abandon its sponsorship of terrorism.  
Last Saturday, the Iranian rial hit a record low against the U.S. dollar, plummeting to 820,500 per dollar on the unofficial market, reflecting uncertainty ahead of Trump’s inauguration on Jan. 20. The rial has depreciated by about 18% since Trump’s election in November. **HW**

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# Jimmy Carter, Former President who Brokered First Arab-Israeli Peace Accord, is Dead at 100



Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, left, U.S. President Jimmy Carter, center, and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin shaking hands at the conclusion of the Camp David Peace Accords signing ceremony in the East Room of the White House, Sept. 17, 1978. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

By Sarah Wildman

(JTA) – WASHINGTON (JTA) – Jimmy Carter, the one-term president who brokered the historic Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt but earned pariah status in some corners of the Jewish community for his criticisms of Israel, has died.

Carter, who had remained active into his final years despite a 2015 diagnosis of liver cancer, died last Sunday at 100 at his home in Plains, Georgia, his non-profit announced.

Carter’s work at Camp David in 1978 led to the first peace treaty between

Israel and an Arab state and radically changed the landscape of the Middle East, diminishing – for the first time in Israel’s history – the threat of regional war. Over 13 days, Carter personally authored 23 drafts of the accord and negotiated separately with both sides after it became clear they could not reach an agreement directly.

Carter grew increasingly critical of Israel in the years after he left the Oval Office, culminating with the 2006 publication of his book “Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid.” While arguments over the book led some in the Jewish world

to accuse the former president of antisemitism, others saw the fight as obscuring a legacy that should be heralded.

“It’s unfair not to see Carter in the full context of what he achieved,” said Stuart Eizenstat, who served as Carter’s chief domestic policy advisor and is now the State Department’s special advisor on Holocaust issues. “He should have been a heroic figure.”

In 1978, against the advice of his advisors, Carter invited Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to the presidential retreat in the Catoclin mountains near Washington. Carter’s approval ratings were then at an all-time low, the economy was in shambles, and neither Begin nor Sadat seemed primed to reach the kind of agreement that would justify such an expenditure of presidential time and goodwill. But Carter’s gamble worked.

“Carter was the hero of Camp David,” said Aharon Barak, the longtime chief justice of the Israeli Supreme Court and a former chief advisor to Begin. “We were sitting I think eight or nine days together. We ate, we did a prayer, we thought of problems, and [we] would sit and sit until late, late at night. Which other president of the United States would be willing to do this?”

Carter wanted the agreement to include a timetable for the end of Israeli settlements, but in the final deal the issue was set aside. In recent years, his undisguised frustration with the growth of settlements, and with the Israeli government more generally, earned him opprobrium that bordered on vitriol in the Jewish world.

Carter was often unsparing in his critiques of Israeli leaders, settlement policy and the continued Jewish presence in the occupied territories. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pointedly did not meet with Carter during the former president’s 2015 recent trip to Israel. Carter, in turn, told the press that a two-state solution was nearly out of reach as long as Netanyahu remained in power, while Hamas, the militant group regarded as a terrorist organization by the United States, was interested in peace.

But it was his 2006 book that most rankled the Jewish community. The text was widely criticized as lopsided in its assessment of the failure of peace negotiations. In no small part it was the use of the term apartheid itself, a word he later walked back and became reluctant to use in public.

“The title is to de-legitimize Israel, because if Israel is like South Africa, it doesn’t really deserve to be a democratic state,” said Abraham Foxman, then the national director of the Anti-Defamation League. “He’s provoking, he’s outrageous, and he’s bigoted.”

In 2009, in a letter released exclusively to JTA, Carter offered an “Al Chet” prayer of atonement for any words that may have “stigmatize[d] Israel.”

Carter was an early and fervent advocate for the rights of Soviet Jews. After Natan – then Anatoly – Sharansky was arrested in 1977, Sharansky’s wife, Avital, lobbied the White House to publicly “prove” her husband was not an American spy. In an unusual move, Carter agreed to state publicly that Sharansky was not involved in espionage.

In 1978, Carter laid the groundwork for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum with the creation of the Presidential

Commission on the Holocaust. Chaired by Elie Wiesel, the commission recommended the establishment of a national Holocaust Museum in Washington.

During the 1979 Iranian revolution, Jewish Iranians attempting to flee to the United States hit obstacles in consulates abroad. Eizenstat and White House Counsel Robert Lipschutz successfully lobbied Carter to create a special – ostensibly temporary – visa that enabled some 50,000 Iranian Jews to enter the United States after the fall of the shah. The visa status was ultimately also used by Iranian Christians and Bahais.

But the years of his presidency, beset by economic woes and the Iranian hostage crisis – in which 52 Americans were held by Iranian students for 444 days – took the glow from his foreign policy wins. Carter’s failure to secure reelection in 1980 is often attributed to his perceived fecklessness in Iran. In that election, Carter won only 45% of the Jewish vote, a historic low for a Democrat.

James Earl Carter, Jr. was born in Plains, “a small town in South Georgia with 683 people in it,” as Carter liked to say. Like his father before him, Carter was a peanut farmer. He married Rosalynn in 1946. The couple had four children.

Carter felt quite keenly the need to address the violent racial history of the south. He did not join the White Citizens Council when he returned from eight years in the Navy. It was 1953, his father had just died, and Carter was shifting gears to life on the farm. His political career began on the school board. He went on to the Georgia State Senate and eventually the governor’s mansion.

When he became governor of Georgia – also a position he would hold for only one term – he famously announced, “The time for racial discrimination is over.” He saw himself as a champion for the oppressed.

A deeply religious man, Carter was unabashed in describing his relationship with God while on the presidential campaign trail in 1976. On his first trip to Israel, in 1973, Carter asked to dip in the waters of the Jordan River. In meeting then Prime Minister Golda Meir on that same trip, he wrote in his 2006 book, he warned her that nothing good had come for the Jews when they had turned from God. The secular prime minister, he reported, was bemused.

In the 45 years since he lost his 1980 reelection bid to Ronald Reagan – the longest post-presidency in U.S. history – Carter was widely celebrated for his work on human rights, hunger reduction and the pursuit of free elections around the globe through the Carter Center, the Atlanta-based nonprofit he founded in 1982 with his wife.

Carter’s religious commitments were part of his motivation to seek peace in the Middle East and for his post-presidential work on poverty and conflict resolution. He was a member of the Elders, a global collective of elder statesmen working on peace and human rights. In 2002, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

“In Judaism, we say ‘Kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh.’ (All Jews are responsible for one another),” Tamara Cofman Wittes said in a 2015 interview when she was director of the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. “I think for President Carter, that was a sentiment that applied to all humanity.” **HW**

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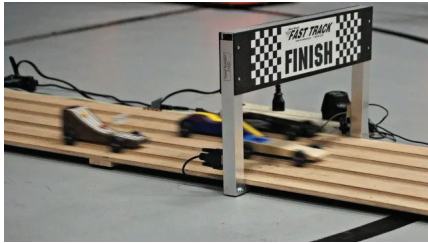


# Boys K-5th Grade Invited to Participate in the Pinewood Derby

Temple Israel Scouting Pack 25 invites boys, who are not scouts, to participate in the Pinewood Derby.



The annual race will take place on Sunday, March 2 from 12:30-3 p.m. in the Scheidt Hall at Temple Israel. To participate, you need to attend a meeting on either Sunday, Jan. 12 or Sunday, Jan. 26 to get a car kit and learn how to design the car and get it cut to make an outstanding car prior to the big race.



The pack normally meets in the scout room in the small brick building with the flagpole behind the Temple Israel Bldg. at 1376 E Massey Rd., Memphis, Tenn., 38120 from 12:30 -1:30 p.m. when Temple Israel Sunday School meets. For questions, contact Mark P. Clemens, MD, Markpclem@aol.com or Robert Marlow, 901-218-7337. [HW](#)

# Gazan Terrorists Fire Rocket at Israel, as IDF Ground Op Presses On



The Iron Dome air-defense system intercepts rockets fired from the Gaza Strip over Sderot, May 13, 2023. Credit: Yonatan Sindel/Flash90

(JNS) – Palestinian terrorists in the central Gaza Strip last Friday fired a rocket at the Israeli border community of Kibbutz Be’eri. The Israel Defense Forces launched an interceptor missile at the rocket and was investigating the incident. There were no reports of injuries in the attack. Air-raid sirens had not sounded in Be’eri, which was devastated during Hamas’s Oct. 7, 2023, massacre, in almost a year. In response, the IDF issued an evacuation order for Palestinian civilians in Gaza’s Bureij area. “Terror organizations are once again firing rockets from this area that has received warnings several times in the past,” Col. Avichay Adraee, the IDF’s Arabic-language spokesman, posted to X. “For your own safety, move immediately to the humanitarian zone,” he added. Last Thursday, after air-raid sirens were activated in Holit at 11:57 a.m., the Israeli Air Force intercepted a projectile fired from the southern Gaza Strip, the military said. Holit is a kibbutz located in the Hevel Shalom region of southwestern Israel. It falls under the jurisdiction of the Eshkol Regional Council. Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip fired two rockets at Israel just as the clock struck midnight last Tuesday

night, marking the new year. Israeli air defenses intercepted one of the rockets, with the other hitting an open field, the Israel Defense Forces said. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack, which caused no injuries or damage. Meanwhile, the Israeli Air Force struck staging grounds for terrorists along with Hamas command and control centers across the Palestinian enclave over the previous 24 hours, the IDF said. “Dozens of Hamas terrorists operated from these compounds, planning and executing attacks against IDF forces and citizens of the State of Israel,” added the military. “Some of the terrorist complexes that were attacked were established in places previously used as schools. This is another example of Hamas’s cynical and systematic use of civilians in the Gaza Strip for terrorist purposes,” the IDF continued. The military stressed that several steps were taken to reduce the chance of harming civilians, including the use of precision munitions, aerial surveillance and additional intelligence. The IDF also noted that Nahal Brigade troops were continuing to conduct raids in northern Gaza’s Beit Hanun area, during which armed terrorist squads were eliminated and weapons, including rocket launchers, mortars, rocket-propelled grenades and explosives, were located and destroyed. [HW](#)

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# How Israel Neutralized a Critical Iranian Missile Threat in Syria



**IDF special forces operators arrive at the Masyaf missile production plant in western Syria, Sept. 8, 2024. Credit: IDF Spokesperson's Office.**

**By Yaakov Lappin**

(JNS) – The Israeli Air Force’s elite Shaldag Unit, supported by the Air Force and Navy, executed a highly complex operation on Sept. 8, targeting and destroying a precision-guided missile manufacturing facility built by Iran in the Masyaf area of western Syria.

This operation neutralized a critical Iranian-led project intended to arm Hezbollah and other terror proxies with advanced, game-changing long-range weapons. The factory was built close to the Lebanese border, indicating its intended role of arming Hezbollah.

For years, the army’s Military Intelligence Directorate monitored the underground compound, which had been constructed deep within a mountainside, according to Lt. Col. Nadav Shashani, IDF international spokesperson, who briefed journalists about the raid last Thursday.

**An imminent and active threat**

The facility was a key component of Iran’s strategy to arm its regional proxies, enabling the production of hundreds

of precision-guided missiles annually, Shoshani said, adding that the missiles posed a severe threat to the Israeli home front.

The missile facility was fully operational for just a month before the operation. It represented the culmination of years of Iranian investment and planning. Israeli intelligence indicated that construction began in 2017 and was completed in 2021, although the advanced machinery and missile assembly lines were only installed by 2024. The factory was equipped to produce missiles with ranges of up to some 300 kilometers (186 miles).

“This was a flagship project of Iran in Syria,” said Shoshani. “This was one of a kind in Syria. This factory in size, in its ability, in its significance to the Iranian axis and for Hezbollah and other groups in Syria, it posed an imminent and active threat to the State of Israel.”

The nighttime raid involved more than 100 Israeli special forces soldiers on the ground, supported by dozens

of aircraft, including fighter jets, unmanned aerial vehicles and helicopters. Naval vessels provided additional firepower and intelligence support, according to the military.

The IDF commandos landed by helicopter, encircling the compound to secure the area before entering the facility.

During the operation, soldiers dismantled critical manufacturing machinery, including a planetary mixer (a device used to mix round products) essential for missile production. They also retrieved intelligence documents, such as chemical handbooks detailing missile production processes.

These materials were transferred to the Intelligence Directorate for analysis. The compound was then destroyed, ensuring it could no longer be used to manufacture missiles.

All IDF soldiers returned safely – a testament to the meticulous planning and implementation of the operation.

**Strategic value for Hezbollah**

The factory’s proximity to the Syrian-Lebanese border is a major clue regarding its strategic value for Hezbollah, which has relied on Iran for advanced weaponry. The site’s destruction delivered a severe blow to Iran’s efforts to establish missile production capabilities in Syria.

The timing of the operation was critical. In the months leading up to the strike, Hezbollah had escalated its attacks on Israel, launching hundreds of projectiles per day. Between October 2023 and November 2024, Hezbollah fired more than 17,000 projectiles, killing dozens of Israelis. Some of these were precision-guided missiles, and Hezbollah had hoped to receive even more powerful missiles from the

Masyaf facility.

According to an IDF infographic, the Masyaf factory was intending to produce surface-to-surface ballistic missiles such as the M220, with a range of 70 kilometers (44 miles); the M302, formerly a rocket converted into a precise missile with a 130-kilometer (81-mile) range; the M600F, also known as a Fateh 110 missile, which had a range of 250-300 kilometers (155-186 miles) and can be fired from a stationary launcher or a truck; and M122 short-range 40-kilometer (25-mile) missiles, which can also be fired from a truck.

The raid is part of Israel’s broader campaign against Iranian weapons smuggling and production in Syria into Lebanon.

“This operation was a statement to the fact that we will not allow Hezbollah or any other terror organization on our borders to have these strategic weapons that can harm and kill our civilians,” said Shoshani.

The underground nature of the Masyaf facility required a ground operation rather than an aerial strike, as aerial attacks on their own were deemed insufficient against such hardened targets.

In recent years and up until a few months ago, Syria was “very comfortable for the Iranian regime to operate in,” said Shoshani.

Looking ahead, he said, despite the fall of the pro-Iranian Assad regime, “we are already on the lookout to make sure that they [the Iranians] are not getting back to it [Syria] and make sure that the routes between Syria and Lebanon remain ineffective.”

This vigilance, he said, is based on the understanding that Iran “will look for new ways to challenge us in the future.” **HW**

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# U.S. Military Vet with ‘Deep-Seated Animus Against Jews’ Tried to Join Hezbollah, Feds Charge



Lebanese Hezbollah fighters train to take part in cross-border raids in Aaramta bordering Israel on May 21, 2023. Credit: Fadel Itani/NurPhoto via Getty Images

By Jackie Hajdenberg

(JTA) – A 24-year-old Irish-American man with a military record was indicted on terrorism charges for traveling to Lebanon and Syria in an attempt to join Hezbollah, the Justice Department announced last Thursday.

Jack Danaher Molloy was arrested in Chicago in early December for lying to FBI agents while being investigated for his effort to join the Lebanese terror group, the Justice Department said in a statement. When FBI agents questioned whether he had ever had any intention of joining Hezbollah, Molloy said he had no plans to do so and had had no business or plans in Syria.

In fact, according to the department, Molloy traveled to Lebanon in August 2024 in an attempt to enlist with Hezbollah and, after being rebuffed, ventured to Syria to try his fortunes with the terror group there. At the time, Israel and Hezbollah were in the midst of a yearlong, escalating conflict on Israel’s northern border.

When Molloy eventually returned to Pittsburgh from the Middle East in October, he was questioned at the airport by FBI agents.

According to an unsealed affidavit, Molloy declared “a very fierce hatred of these Zionists” and was excited by the prospect of fighting them.

Molloy frequently employed antisemitic and violent names and references in usernames and social media posts, according to the affidavit, which said one of his email addresses was glassofjuice88@[REDACTED].com. The first phrase is sometimes used by extremists as a homophone for “gas the Jews,” while 88 is a common white supremacist code for “Heil Hitler.” The affidavit also said that around Oct. 7, 2024, the one-year anniversary of Hamas’ invasion of Israel, Molloy created the email kikekiller696969@[REDACTED].com and googled how to join Hezbollah.

Molloy is a dual citizen of the United States and Ireland who served about a month of active duty as an American soldier in 2019 and later sought to join an Army training program at the University of Illinois Chicago.

He converted to Shia Islam in February 2024 and was known among his contacts as “Yahya,” per the affidavit. (Yahya Sinwar, Hamas’ leader in Gaza, was the architect of the Oct. 7 attack and led the group until Israeli troops killed him in October.)

Molloy allegedly revealed to his mother in a Whatsapp message that he intended to join Hezbollah to kill Jews, and was also considering fighting for Russia, an ally of the recently ousted Syrian regime, against Ukraine in order to eventually join Hezbollah. When his

mother asked him if his “master plan was to join Hezbollah and kill Jews,” he answered that it was.

As documented in the affidavit, communication between Molloy and his contacts also shed light on Hezbollah’s recruitment and training practices and indicated that they were in disarray during the time he sought to join the group, as Israel ratcheted up pressure through a mass pager detonation in advance of a ground invasion. At one point, a contact urged Molloy to leave, saying that Hezbollah was “not accepting anyone and due to the high number of Mossad agents, and moles, appearing inside.” She told him that he should consider other ways to achieve jihad.

“Sometimes a voice is far more powerful than a weapon and sometimes a pen is far more powerful than a knife,” the contact told Molloy via WhatsApp, according to the affidavit.

Upon their confiscation, his cell phone and laptop were reportedly found to have multiple violent antisemitic memes, Hezbollah propaganda, and images that appear to show solidarity between a Nazi SS soldier and a generic jihadi soldier.

In mid-November, Molloy also allegedly visited a website that said where Robert Bowers, who committed the 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue shooting,

was imprisoned. “As alleged, Jack Molloy, an avowed adherent of Hizballah harboring deep-seated animus against Jews, took many steps over a period of months – at home and abroad – in his effort to join and fight for this deadly foreign terrorist organization,” U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania Eric G. Olshan said in a statement last Thursday. “This case is yet another sobering reminder of the threat of radicalized violence against Americans.” Molloy faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, a fine of \$250,000, or both for the charge of providing material support for a foreign terror organization. Each charge of making a false statement to the FBI carries a maximum sentence of eight years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both, according to the Justice Department. **HW**

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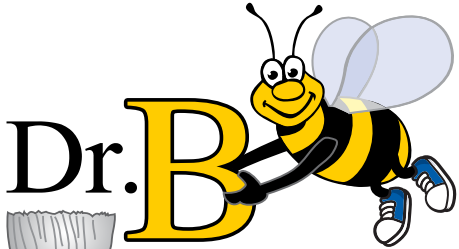
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# FAFSA for 2025–2026 School Year Opened December 1

Provided by Mike Stein, Managing Director - Investments Wells Fargo Advisors

Questions for Mike? You can reach him at 901.761.8151 or Michael.Stein@WellsFargoAdvisors.com fa.wellsfargoadvisors.com/michael-stein

For the second year in a row, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, commonly known as the FAFSA, was delayed. The FAFSA for the 2025–2026 school year opened on December 1 instead of the typical October 1 date. Last year, despite a redesigned FAFSA that was supposed to be easier to complete, families faced a perfect storm — a delayed rollout, technical glitches, and processing delays, which led to confusion and late financial aid packages from colleges. By one estimate, as of March 2024, FAFSA completions for the class of 2024 were down 40% from the prior year, with only about 27% of the class of 2024 successfully completing a FAFSA, compared to 45% for the class of 2023.<sup>1</sup>

Tips for submitting the FAFSA

The 2025–2026 FAFSA is the same as the redesigned, streamlined version from last year. Here's what you need to know about completing the form.

• FSA ID. To file the FAFSA online, parents and students each need their own FSA ID, which is a username/password combination that functions as a legal signature. You can create an FSA ID online, and the same ID can be used for all years of college.

• Income and assets. The FAFSA requires two key types of information: income and assets. For income, the 2025–2026 FAFSA will rely on information from your 2023 federal income tax return (it essentially looks back two years). This data will be automatically imported from the IRS. For assets, the FAFSA will use the value of your assets as of the date you submit the form.

• Student Aid Index. The FAFSA calculates a figure called the "Student Aid Index," which is a yardstick that measures aid eligibility. Colleges use this figure to craft a financial aid package that attempts to meet a student's financial need (colleges are not obligated to

meet 100% of need).

• Eligibility for Direct Loans. All students who file the FAFSA are eligible for an unsubsidized federal Direct Loan, regardless of financial need. But students who demonstrate need on the FAFSA are eligible for a subsidized Direct Loan, which means the government pays the interest that accrues during school and any loan deferment periods. Students with a high level of financial need may also qualify for a federal Pell Grant.

• College aid. Some colleges might require the FAFSA before awarding students certain college-based aid, including merit scholarships and grants, so filing it can still be beneficial, even if a student does not plan on taking out any federal loans.

The FAFSA must be submitted every year for students to be eligible for federal aid. For more information, families can visit the federal student aid website at studentaid.gov.

1) National College Attainment Network, April 8, 2024

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# Ford Motor Company Apologizes after X Account Posts 'Israel is a Terrorist State'

By Philissa Cramer

(JTA) – For a period of time last Monday, anyone tuning into the X account of Ford Motor Company could see three pro-Palestinian tweets that had nothing to do with the car company's business.

"Free Palestine," said the first message. Another followed a minute later: "Israel is a terrorist state." Moments later, a third: "ALL EYES ON GAZA."

The messages were soon deleted and Ford said in a statement that they had not been permitted.

"Our X account was briefly compromised, and the previous three posts were not authorized or posted by Ford," the company said. "We are investigating the issue and apologize for any confusion caused."

The incident comes nearly 15 months into the Israel-Hamas war, which has ignited fierce criticism of Israel's operations in Gaza. It carried particular resonance because of Ford's headquarters in Detroit, an area with a large Ar-

ab-American population where pro-Palestinian advocacy has been strong, and because of the company's history of antisemitism emanating from its founder, Henry Ford.

Ford's record of antisemitism included using a newspaper he owned to spread antisemitism, including the notorious forgery "Protocols of the Elders of Zion." (A Jewish production company is currently trying to turn a 2012 book about the Dearborn Independent into a feature-length film.)

Some who saw the posts as screenshots of them circulated on social media applauded them. Others denounced the posts, with some speculating on the cause. "Ford Motor Company must have been hacked by the Free Palestine movement," tweeted Rep. Ritchie Torres, a pro-Israel Democrat from New York. Many in his hundreds of comments said they suspected that a Ford employee had forgotten which account was active before tweeting. [HW](#)



# Treasury Slaps Sanctions on Iranian, Russian Entities for 2024 Election Interference

***“The governments of Iran and Russia have targeted our election processes and institutions and sought to divide the American people through targeted disinformation campaigns,” a Treasury Department official stated.***

(JNS) – The U.S. Treasury Department announced last Tuesday that it imposed new sanctions on Iranian and Russian entities that tried to interfere in the 2024 U.S. presidential election.

Starting in at least 2023, the Tehran-based Cognitive Design Production Center, a subsidiary of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, a U.S.-designated terror organization, attempted to “incite socio-political tensions among the U.S. electorate” ahead of the presidential elections, Treasury alleges.

The Moscow-based Center for Geopolitical Expertise created and spread artificial intelligence-generated images and other “deep fakes” intended to influence U.S. voters and sow discord through a network of more than 100 websites with the direction and funding of Russia’s GRU intelligence service.

“The governments of Iran and Russia have targeted our election processes and institutions and sought to divide the American people through targeted disinformation campaigns,” stated Bradley Smith, acting under secretary of the Treasury for terrorism and financial intelligence. “The United States will remain vigilant against adversaries who would undermine our democracy.”

The allegations from the Treasury Department are the latest indication of Iranian and Russian efforts to influence the American electorate.

In September, the Department of Justice charged three Iranians with hacking email accounts from President-elect Donald Trump’s election campaign and attempting to leak the results to the media. An internal opposition research file on Vice President-elect J.D. Vance was among the materials that were stolen from the campaign and published.

Iran has also plotted to assassinate Trump and other Americans in retaliation for the 2020 killing of IRGC commander Qassem Soleimani, and in November, the Justice Department charged two Americans and an Iranian in a murder-for-hire conspiracy that targeted Trump. (There are no known links to Iran in either of the two assassination attempts on Trump in 2024.)

In the build up to the election, the U.S. intelligence community repeatedly issued warnings about foreign efforts to interfere in the presidential contest and in the leadup to the inauguration on Jan. 20, 2025.

The intelligence community “assesses that this year China, Iran and Russia are better prepared to exploit opportunities to exert influence in the U.S. general election after the polls close on Election Day due to lessons drawn from the 2020 election cycle,” per an Oct. 8 memorandum of the National Intelligence Council.

“We expect these actors to at least conduct information operations denigrating U.S. democracy through Inauguration Day,” it stated. **HW**



Goldie K. Burson

Goldie K. Burson (1926–2025) passed away peacefully at home, leaving behind a legacy of love, kindness and unwavering spirit. Preceded in death by her husband, Sam M. Burson, and son-in-law Robert M. Friedman, and survived by her 4 daughters, Susan Rossen (Skip), Elaine Friedman, Sheila Burkholz (Steven), Carole Burson, 7 grandchildren (and 4 granddaughters in-law), and 9 great-grandchildren.

Goldie was born and raised in New York City. She took a leap of faith when she moved to Memphis with her new husband. It was in this city that she

found her true calling and made an indelible mark on everyone she met.

She worked tirelessly at Burson’s Pharmacy, assisting her family and serving the community with dedication. Her passion for good food led her to The Bagel kosher deli, where her warm personality drew in a loyal clientele. She later joined Catering by Marilyn bringing joy to countless events.

A prolific blood donor, Goldie was recognized for her consistent and regular donations, and this contribution to the community was a source of pride. She also devoted her time to volunteering at the Wings Cancer Care Foundation at West Cancer Center and at St. Jude Children’s Hospital, offering comfort and support to those in need.

Goldie embraced fitness with gusto, winning multiple trophies for top finishes in charity 5k run/walks, well into her 80s. At the JCC Fitness Center, she became a fixture, putting exercise first, closely followed by socializing, making and maintaining friendships.

Goldie leaves behind a legacy of love, compassion and community. Her unwavering kindness and boundless energy will be remembered by all who had the privilege of knowing her.

The family requests memorials be sent to Baron Hirsch Synagogue, Beth Sholom Synagogue or Memphis Jewish Community Center. **HW**

# ‘They Better Let the Hostages Go Soon,’ Trump Warns



U.S. President-elect Donald Trump speaks at the 2024 AmericaFest at the Phoenix Convention Center in Arizona, Dec. 22, 2024. Credit: Gage Skidmore/Creative Commons.

(JNS) – President-elect Donald Trump last Tuesday repeated his call for the release of Israeli hostages in Gaza, amid reports of an impasse in the efforts to broker a deal toward that end.

An interlocutor asked Trump about the captives last Tuesday night, at his Mar-A-Lago resort in Florida, noting that Trump had warned “there will be hell to pay” unless they are freed by the time he takes office on Jan. 20.

“We’ll see what happens,” Trump replied. “They better let the hostages come back soon.”

Indirect talks between Israel and Hamas are at a stalemate, “The Wall Street Journal” last Tuesday quoted Arab mediators as saying, making a deal unlikely during President Joe Biden’s term in office.

The negotiations center on the prospect of a 60-day ceasefire and the release of up to 30 hostages, according to what mediators told the “Journal.” Israel would set free Palestinian prisoners (i.e. terrorists) and allow more humanitarian aid to flow into Gaza in exchange, they said.

But Hamas wants bodies of dead hostages to be included in the 30 freed Israelis, to which Israel objected. And Israel has refused to release some of the terrorists sought by Hamas, which insists the ceasefire include a framework for a long-term truce.

***The president-elect reiterated his call for the Israelis in Gaza to be released before he takes office.***

The mediators said that they expected both sides to return to the negotiating table after the new administration takes over in Washington.

Hamas abducted 250 people from the northwestern Negev on Oct. 7, 2023, as part of its invasion, in which it also murdered some 1,200 people. Of the hostages, 96 remain in Gaza (along with four others taken previously), but dozens are believed to have died.

Israel launched an ongoing military campaign to dismantle Hamas and retrieve the hostages. In November 2023, about 100 hostages returned in exchange for a weeklong ceasefire and the release of hundreds of Palestinian terrorists.

Trump, who has met with relatives of the captives, appointed Adam Boehler as his special envoy for hostage affairs. Boehler met last month in Israel with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

“We are trying to help very strongly in getting the hostages back,” Trump said last month. Biden has also vowed to free the hostages. **HW**

## Maura Ellen Schneider

It is with deep sorrow that we announce the passing of Maura Ellen Schneider on January 2, 2025, in Memphis, Tennessee. Born in Knoxville, Tennessee, she spent the majority of her life in Memphis. She graduated from White Station High School and attended college at Lincoln College in Illinois and the University of Tennessee-Martin. After college, she returned to Memphis and worked as a nursing assistant at the former Doctor’s Hospital. She was then employed for many years at National Mortgage Company, where she was known for her dedication and ready smile. She was deeply active in the Jewish community and a dedicated member of Baron Hirsch Synagogue where she contributed time and energy to numerous senior luncheons and other events. Ellen enjoyed and was an active participant in group activities sponsored by Fogelman Jewish Family Services of Memphis.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Rita and David Schneider, whose memory she cherished deeply. She is survived by her devoted sister, Francie Schneider, and her brother, Michael (Barbara) Schneider, niece, nephew, dear friend Lovette and many cousins. Ellen’s friends and family will always remember her for her kind and gentle nature.

The family requests donations in Ellen’s memory be sent to Baron Hirsch Synagogue or Fogelman Jewish Family Services at the Memphis Jewish Community Center. **HW**

# IAF Strike Kills Hamas Leader Behind Nir Oz Massacre Abd al-Hadi Sabah orchestrated attacks against Israeli soldiers throughout the current war.

(JNS) – An Israeli Air Force strike killed Abd al-Hadi Sabah, a Hamas operative responsible for leading the deadly assault on Kibbutz Nir Oz during the Oct. 7, 2023, massacre in the northwestern Negev, the IDF announced last Tuesday night.

Sabah was a Nukhba Force platoon commander within Hamas’s Western Khan Yunis Battalion. He operated from a shelter in a designated humanitarian area in Khan Yunis.

Throughout the current war, Sabah orchestrated attacks against Israeli Defense Forces troops. His death was achieved through a coordinated effort between the Israeli Air Force, the IDF and the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet).

The military highlighted that measures were taken before the strike to minimize civilian casualties. The IDF and Shin Bet reiterated their commitment to targeting all individuals involved in the Oct. 7 assault, which resulted in some 1,200 fatalities, thousands of injuries, and the abduction of 251 individuals, of whom 96 remain in Gaza, along with four others taken earlier.

Kibbutz Nir Oz suffered some of the heaviest losses on Oct. 7, with a quarter of its residents killed or taken hostage. **HW**



## Trump Will Weaken Iran, Hamas, Top Fatah Official Says



**Fatah supporters gather for a rally ahead of the 60th anniversary of its establishment in Ramallah, Samaria, on Dec. 31, 2024. Credit: Flash90.**

(JNS) – A senior Palestinian Authority official leader expects U.S. President-elect Donald Trump to “destroy Iran,” weakening Hamas in Gaza and strengthening the P.A., he told the “New York Post” in an interview published last Monday.

“We see that Trump and the ruling government in Israel are planning to destroy Iran,” the “Post” quoted Mohammad Hamdan, secretary general of the Fatah movement that rules the Palestinian Authority, as saying.

This will weaken Hamas because of “Hamas’s link to regimes outside Palestine,” he said. (Iran has been a supporter and financier of Hamas, among other proxies that it helped set up around Israel and its other regional foes.) “We are confronting Hamas’s ideology,” Hamdan was quoted as adding in the inter-

view, which was conducted on Dec. 19.

Palestinian Authority security forces have cracked down on Hamas in Judea and Samaria in recent weeks after on Dec. 6, Islamists seized two P. A. vehicles and paraded them while displaying Hamas and ISIS flags. At least three people were killed in subsequent raids on Hamas and Islamist cells by the Palestinian Authority since then.

“Hamas rejects international legitimacy, meaning U.N. resolutions,” Hamdan said, according to the “Post.” “The world cannot accept a situation where a party does not accept international resolutions.”

Hamas won the last Palestinian Authority legislative election in January 2006 and seized power over Gaza in June 2007. The P.A., under its “president,” Mahmoud Abbas, rules parts of Judea and Samaria. **HW**

## Josh Stein Sworn in as Governor of North Carolina



**Josh Stein. Credit: waketechcc/ Flickr via Wikimedia Commons.**

(JNS) – Josh Stein was sworn in as the 76th governor of North Carolina – and the first Jewish one – on Jan. 1.

The 58-year-old is the third attorney general to move up to the state’s top job.

“As I take this oath of office, I am profoundly aware of the solemn responsibility before me: to uphold the Constitution of the State of North Carolina and to serve our people,” he said, according to an official press release.

“The work ahead of us is significant, but the time is now to build a safer, stronger North Carolina, where our economy continues to grow and works for everyone, where our public schools are excellent and our teachers are well-paid, and where our neighborhoods are safe and our

personal freedoms are protected,” it said.

He also noted the urgency to help those in the western part of the state recover from Hurricane Helene in late September, which left a swath of destruction in its wake. In fact, one of Stein’s first actions is to announce Hurricane Helene relief.

Stein, a father of three, was accompanied by his wife, Anna, and family for the ceremony, which took place in the Old Senate Chambers at Capitol in downtown Raleigh. He replaces the outgoing two-term governor, Roy Cooper. North Carolina Secretary of State Elaine Marshall oversaw the proceedings.

“I think he’s got one of the most serious day-one challenges anybody’s ever had, and that is the devastation in western North Carolina to people’s lives, to the economy, to the beauty of the place,” said Marshall, according to the local ABC affiliate. “There’s just so much work that’s going to have to be done, and we need to all be in with both shoulders pushing forward.”

He swore his oath of office on a Tanach, showcasing his connection to Judaism. Pastor James Gailliard and Rabbi Judith Schindler offered prayers and words of wisdom.

Stein joins six other Jewish governors in the country, along with Matt Meyer (Del.), Jared Polis (Colo.), J.B. Pritzker (Ill.), Josh Green (Hawaii) and Josh Shapiro (Pa.), all Democrats.

He posted a recap video of his first day in office, with the caption: “First day in the books. Let’s keep going.” **HW**

## Netanyahu Formally Discharged from Hospital after Leaving Early to Shore Up His Unstable Coalition



**Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks during a plenum session at the assembly hall of the Knesset, the Israeli parliament in Jerusalem, Feb. 19, 2024. Credit: Yonatan Sindel/Flash90**

**By Ben Sales**

(JTA) – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been formally discharged from the hospital four days after prostate removal surgery – and two

days after he left his hospital bed early to cast a decisive vote on a budget bill, stymying a rebellion in his own governing coalition.

“I just left Hadassah Ein Kerem Hospital and want to thank the many, many of you, citizens of Israel, for the prayers, strength and support that greatly moved me and my family,” he tweeted last Thursday, also thanking the medical team at the Jerusalem medical center.

Netanyahu, 75, underwent the successful operation on Dec. 29 and was meant to recover in the hospital for several days. But he went to Israel’s parliament, the Knesset, two days later contrary to medical advice to ensure the passage of a tax bill, a sign of festering divisions in Israel’s government as the new year begins.

One of Netanyahu’s governing coalition partners – the far-right Otzma Yehudit, or Jewish Power party – is demanding a funding boost for the Israel Police, and has been voting against the coalition’s bills as a pressure tactic. The party’s leader, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, oversees the police – and has not received the funds he is

seeking.

Without that support, Netanyahu’s vote was necessary to ensure the tax bill’s passage. Another member of Netanyahu’s Likud Party, Boaz Bismuth, likewise left the weeklong shiva mourning period for his recently deceased mother to vote for the bill. It ended up passing by one vote, 59-58.

Netanyahu, who returned to the hospital after the vote, excoriated Ben-Gvir, posting on X that he, along with the other members of the coalition, should “refrain from shaking up the coalition and endangering the existence of a right-wing government at a decisive moment in Israel’s history.”

Ben-Gvir was unapologetic, tweeting, “I have no problem taking the heat, even when it isn’t so popular, even at the price of it hurting me.”

If Ben-Gvir’s six-member party were to exit the coalition, it would leave Netanyahu with a thin majority of 62-58 in the 120-seat Knesset. **HW**

## Israel and U.S. Conclude Joint Cyber Defense Exercise

(JNS) – A joint Israeli-American cyber defense exercise, “CYBERDOME IX,” concluded [the last week in December] in the United States, marking a significant collaboration amid growing online threats to both nations, the IDF announced last Tuesday.

The exercise, jointly conducted by the U.S. Cyber Command and the Israel Defense Forces’ J6 and Cyber Defense

Directorate, as well as the Intelligence Directorate, is the premier annual cyber defense training event between the two allies.

Dozens of personnel from the IDF and U.S. Cyber Command participated, engaging in battlefield simulations that tested both offensive and defensive strategies.

Maj. Gen. Aviad Dagan, head of the J6

and Cyber Defense Directorate, emphasized the exercise’s significance: “This collaboration highlights the critical importance of the U.S.-Israel partnership in the cyber domain. It provides a strategic opportunity to deepen professional ties, share expertise, and strengthen the digital defenses of both nations against evolving threats.”

Brig. Gen. Matthew Lennox, deputy

commanding general of the Joint Force Headquarters –Cyber, U.S. Army Cyber Command, said: “Now in its ninth iteration, CYBERDOME provides a vital platform for U.S. and Israeli cyber teams to train in a complex environment. It strengthens the bond between our nations and fosters a shared understanding of cyber operations.” **HW**



# Birthright Celebrates 25th Anniversary



**Birthright Israel participants visiting the city of Safed seen here with Mayor of Safed, Yossi Kakon. Credit: Nehemia Rosenfeld, courtesy of Birthright Israel.**

**By Roni Shkedy**

(Israel Hayom via JNS) – Birthright Israel commemorates its quarter-century milestone, with approximately 6,500 young participants scheduled to arrive this winter to support the recovery of Israel’s tourism sector. More than 300 international groups

will engage in volunteer programs and diverse internships across Israel. Since November 2023, all tours have incorporated war-related elements, including visits to “Hostage Square,” tours of Gaza border communities, volunteering initiatives, and encounters with Oct. 7

survivors. In addition to the standard visits showcasing Israel’s vibrant character to young diaspora Jews, the organization is preparing to welcome about 10,000 volunteers throughout 2025. These volunteers, predominantly Birthright alumni, will support the rehabilitation of Gaza border kibbutzim and northern communities as residents return to rebuild. This expansion builds on volunteer programs established in November 2023, which brought approximately 8,500 volunteers to Israel over the past year. Responding to strong interest, Birthright has now extended the age eligibility for these programs to 50. The project’s cumulative economic impact on the Israeli economy since its inception amounts to approximately 8.5 billion shekels, covering expenses for flights, accommodations, attractions, dining, transportation, tour guides, and more. The organization generates a fourfold return on every government dollar invested, directly benefiting the Israeli economy. As the world’s premier education-al-tourism organization connecting diaspora Jewish youth with Israel, Birthright proudly celebrates 25 years of

impact with more than 850,000 alumni. It stands as the 21st century’s most significant Zionist organization, shaping an entire generation and functioning as Israel’s strategic “Iron Dome” in the realm of Jewish identity. Gidi Mark, Birthright’s CEO, notes, “Despite the war and potential escalation threats, the thousands of young people we brought this year comprised 87% of youth group tourism staying in Israeli hotels and visiting tourist sites. This represents a crucial lifeline for the local tourism industry.” “Our dedication to sustaining Birthright programs has never been stronger, even amid security challenges. Since the war’s onset, we’ve witnessed remarkable resilience and determination from participants to visit Israel and maintain their support after returning home. The conflict has underscored our mission’s significance—both in fortifying participants’ Jewish identity and connection to Israel, enabling them to articulate Israel’s perspective worldwide, and in Birthright’s essential role in bolstering Israel’s tourism sector and economy, especially in peripheral regions.” *Originally published by Israel Hayom. HW*

# How Will ‘Nosferatu’ Deal with the Antisemitic Origin of Vampires?

*The remake of the 1922 Dracula-inspired film has the chance to thrill and not offend Jewish audiences*



**Courtesy of Focus Features**

**By Isabella Reish**

*This originally appeared on Hey Alma on Dec. 18, 2024, reprinted with permission.* Bloodsuckers are back, baby. Kristin Stewart is returning to her vampire roots on the big screen, “What We Do in the Shadows” is wrapping up its stellar sixth and final season and most importantly for my interest in this article: Robert Eggers’ remake of “Nosferatu” is one of the most highly anticipated films of the year. I like to argue that vampires and Judaism have a lot of connections, not simply the obvious antisemitic one. Hear me out! When I first watched the 1922 silent “Nosferatu,” the first feature-length adaptation of Bram Stoker’s novel “Dracula,” I was immediately struck by the overt antisemitism of the titular character. Although there is a noticeable lack of research into the potential Jewishness of Nosferatu, it does not take a particularly discerning viewer to notice the monster’s hunching pose, large ears and bushy eyebrows – all attributes common in antisemitic cartoons. Although he does appear similar to Bram Stoker’s description of Dracula – a tall man with pointed ears and sharp teeth – when these elements are considered in

conjunction with the rising antisemitic sentiment in Germany during the interwar period, it’s reasonable to form a connection. Whether or not Nosferatu’s physical expression was intentionally reminiscent of offensive caricatures, vampires and antisemitism have always been intrinsically linked. It’s impossible to have this discussion without bringing up blood libel, the unsubstantiated claims that Jews murdered gentile children to use their blood in rituals. Thus, European vampires of old are intrinsically linked to Jewishness. This “Other” – almost human, almost able to fit into society – is instead forced to live on its outskirts, much like European Jews forced to live in isolated communities. The default vampire of the collective consciousness is Eastern European, much like many Jewish immigrants of the early 1900s. The count in Bram Stoker’s novel lives in the Transylvanian (now Romanian) countryside. Bela Lugosi, star of 1933’s “Dracula,” was a Hungarian-American actor that spoke in his natural accent for the role. His speaking voice became an iconic, recognized trait of creatures of the night, creating yet another link to Jewishness.

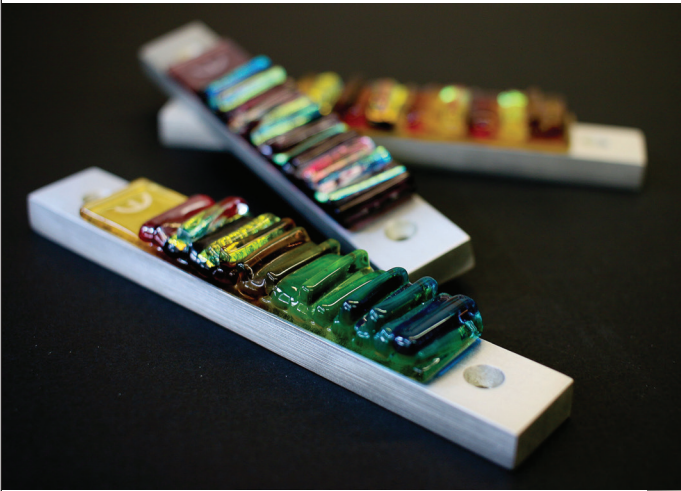
Over time, this has exacerbated the belief in the vampire as the “foreigner,” an ambiguous immigrant boogeyman that would love nothing more than to enter your home and harm you, if you would only be so kind as to invite him in. In an interview with Anthony Breznican for “Vanity Fair,” Robert Eggers shares that his modern physical depiction of the creature is more similar to “folk vampires” than it is true to Murnau’s film or Stoker’s description, appearing less human, less connected to notions of antisemitism, more undead. This conjures the image of a pre-Christian vampire, far before our time, before the first “Nosferatu,” even before Bram Stoker. I’m excited to see what this version of the movie has to offer when it comes to expanding the vampire canon – I expect something less likely to offend and more likely to thrill. To an extent, vampires are always in vogue. From the dawn of humanity to Bram Stoker to “Blade,” humans have always had a place in our hearts for creatures of the night. Why? Well, besides being sexy and fun, every time they pop up, they carry something far worse than a bloodborne pathogen: the crushing weight of all of the social issues of our time! It’s true. The fascinating thing about vampires in film is that they always seem to represent an underlying societal fear – such as immigrants and foreigners – or an unspoken desire that a viewer may be ashamed of or society may not be ready to embrace, like in the case of the never named yet undeniably overt homosexual relationship in “Interview with the Vampire.” Throughout cinematic history, vampires have always expressed the darkest parts of humanity, whether that darkness is based in fear, desire or a horrifying mix of both. Vampires may not show up in mirrors, but they undoubtedly reflect back the things about ourselves that we refuse to acknowledge. Although anti-immigrant sentiment is soaring, transphobia is being written into law and discrimination against Jew-

ish and Muslim communities is on the rise, it actually seems to me a bit of a strange time for vampires to have their comeback. They represent what is under the surface: the shameful, quiet things we can’t say out loud, or don’t want to. But right now, it seems that absolutely everything is being said out loud. People have never been so outspoken and unashamed in their beliefs, enabled by their echo chambers and social media. In fact, the loudest, most outlandish of them all are the people we chose to elect to public office. So, there must be another reason for the Count to return. This moment is not about vampires standing in for our unspoken fears. In that same “Vanity Fair” interview, Eggers said about his take on the old film: “The archetypal motif is a demon lover story. It’s not so much love, it’s obsession.” We can conclude that the vampire of the present is much less related to our fears and much more tied to our desires: the dark parts of ourselves that exist beyond the realm of human love and connection. While we are happy to openly discuss our fears, unashamed to express our hatred and division, what we still struggle with is expressing what it is that we really, truly, want. It seems that “Nosferatu” may be ready to address that! Of course, if when the film is released, it is clearly tied to antisemitism or any other wide-reaching social issue, I reserve the right to retract this statement and open the floor for further discussion. But for now, I’m terribly excited to spend Jewish Christmas dragging my extended family to watch the same, beautiful story of the Count be told yet again, much like the cyclical re-reading of the Torah. I’ve studied vampires for years (can you tell?) but I still have so much more to learn and to think about when it comes to the undead. Every time we engage with this narrative, it teaches us something new and recontextualizes our modern problems through truths and morals that have guided people for centuries. And is there anything more Jewish than that? **HW**





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